
CLOSURE

The Gestalt principle of closure describes our ability to see incomplete forms as whole. Our minds react to shapes that are familiar and fill in the missing information.

On a dark evening, when looking up into the sky, we may notice a bright curved line. We have learned that this is the new moon, or the fingernail moon from ancient stories and songs ([Figure 3.61](#)). We see the moon in partial outline but we interpret that outline as representing the entire sphere. This is because our experience in moon watching teaches us that there is a larger form, even when much of it is not visible. It is also because we tend to perceive geometric shapes as complete, even when parts are missing. Closure is a perceptual process—whether conscious or unconscious—through which we fill in the missing information for familiar or regular shapes where only partial ones exist ([Figure 3.62](#)).

The principle of closure often operates in figure-ground relationships that are unstable. Armin

Hofmann's poster on "good form" relies on our knowledge of complete letterforms in order to read the primary message (in this case in German). At the same time, positive and negative forms reverse back and forth, calling additional attention to black rectangles that are formed entirely by the way in which the designer interrupted the letterforms ([Figure 3.63](#)). Closure allows us to see these as geometric shapes in addition to the letterforms themselves and figure-ground moves them forward and backward in the picture plane.

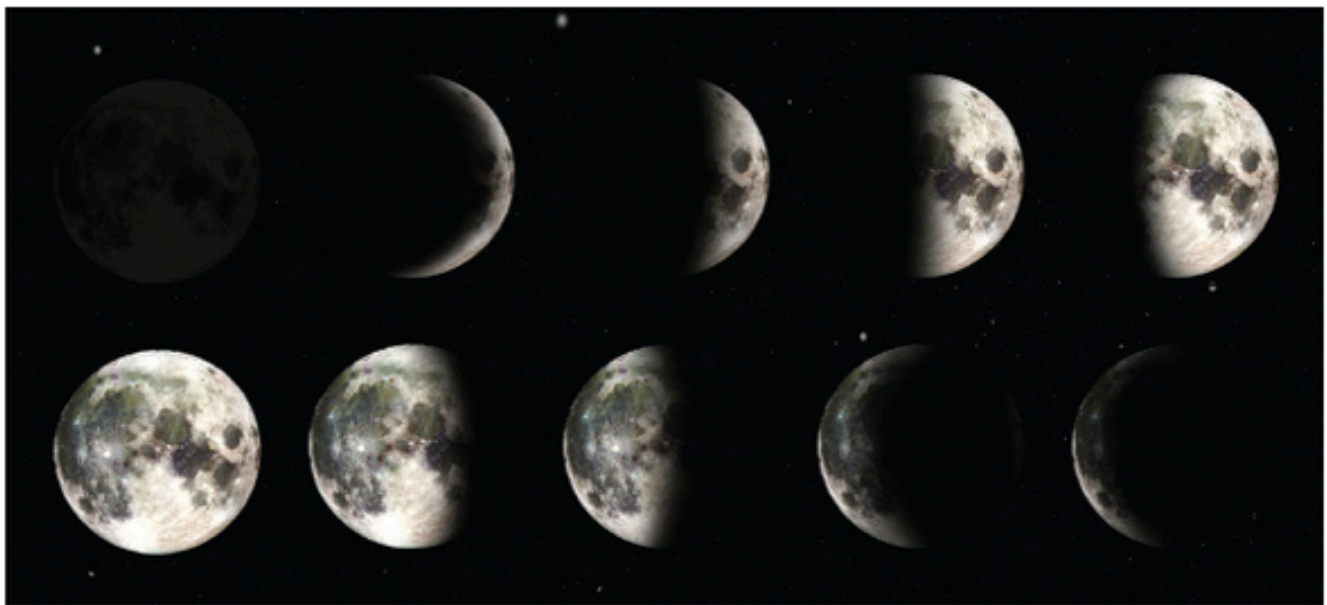


Figure 3.61

Perception of the moon as a complete sphere, regardless of

partial visibility during some cycles, is an example of the Gestalt principle of closure.

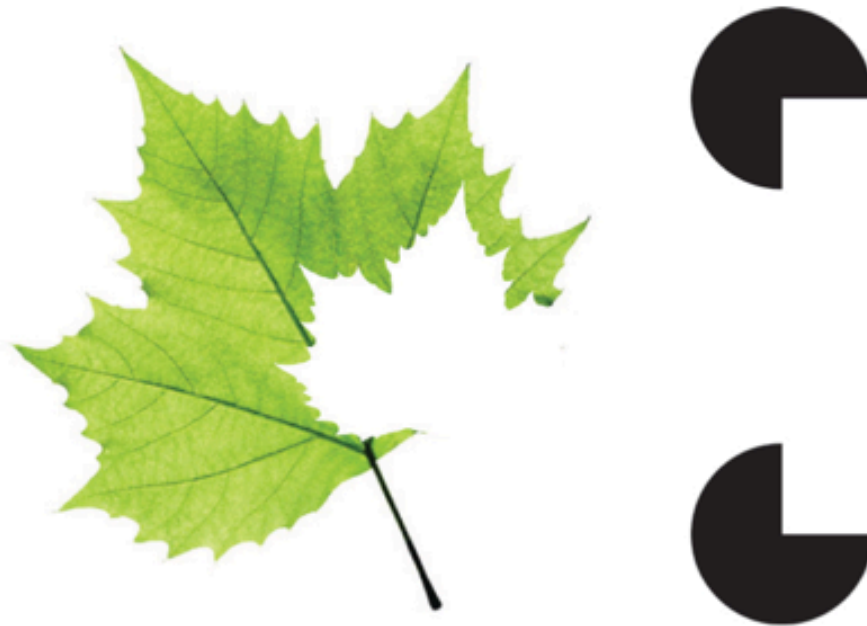


Figure 3.62

The Gestalt principle of closure states that when presented with fragmentary stimuli forming a nearly complete image, the mind tends to ignore the missing parts and perceives the figure as whole.

Closure is important to the design of many logos. It allows open forms to integrate successfully with a variety of surfaces—the pattern of a building façade or the ridges of corrugated packaging, for example—without having to add a background shape that could

be overly complex at small sizes or that would conflict with the familiar shape of the subject itself. In some cases, the incompleteness of form reads as highlights. In other cases, it heightens the expressive attributes of the object by eliminating features ([Figure 3.64](#)).

Understanding the power of the mind to complete images allows designers flexibility in how they represent subjects. If the shape is simple or the object familiar, then the designer can take liberties with its representation, removing unnecessary detail. It also allows designers to manipulate parts-to-whole relationships, substituting simplified or abstracted parts and letting the viewer complete the figure.

die gute form

SWB-Sonderschau
Die gute Form
Veranstaltet
vom Schweizerischen
Werkbund
und der
Schweizerischen
Mustermesse
Mustermesse Basel
8. bis 18. Mai 1954

Figure 3.63

Die Gute Form (Good Form), 1954 Armin Hofmann

Hofmann's poster for an exhibition at the Swiss Industries Fair calls attention to the concept of form by leaving letterforms incomplete. Viewers complete the letterforms in their minds.



Figure 3.64

**Range Design and Architecture Graphic Identity Thirst Designer:
John Pobjewski Creative Consultant: Rick Valicenti**

The designer carefully eliminates portions of the letterforms in the logotype. The defining strokes of each character remain and the overall effect is one of “constructing the word,” consistent with the activities of the firm.
